

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4709

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 10752

PASS COMMERCE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN, TH

SUBJ: EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES - DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES

REF: BANGKOK 16802, NOV. 28, 1972 AND PREVIOUS

1. AMBASSADOR IN COURSE OF COURTESY CALL ON NEW MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS RAISED QUESTION OF FUTURE PURCHASES OF DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES IN LIGHT OF OIL SHORTAGES AND RISING PRICES.

2. MINISTER REAFFIRMED INTENTION OF MINISTRY TO PROCEED WITH PROGRAM OF REPLACING ALL STEAM LOCOMOTIVES WITH DIESEL POWER. SAID THT INVITATIONS TO BID FOR ABOUT 65 ADDITIONAL LOCOMOTIVES WOULD BE ISSUED AROUND JANUARY 1975. PROCEEDED TO CRITICISE PAST PURCHASES, INCLUDING THE 1972 FRENCH CONTRACT FOR THE ALSTHOM LOCOMOTIVE, ON THE GROUND THAT CONSIDERATIONS OTHER THAN DURABILITY AND MINIMUM DOWN TIME HAD BEEN DETERMINING. IN CASE OF FRENCH CONTRACT SAID IT WAS THE LOW COST FINANCING THAT PROVED SO ATTRACTIVE TO MINISTRY OF FINANCE. SAID ALL NON-AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVES NOW IN INVENTORY HAD PRESENTED EXCESSIVE REPAIR PROBLEMS, AND INDICATED THAT ALSTHOM WOULD NOT BE AN EXCEPTION. SAID THE FRENCH LOCOMOTIVE WAS OF GOOD QUALITY BUT NOT WELL SUITED FOR THAI CONDITIONS. ALSO REMARKED THAT GENERAL ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVE WAS TOO HEAVY BUT OTHERWISE MADE CLEAR THAT HIS PREFERENCE WAS FOR AMERICAN EQUIPMENT BECAUSE OF ITS DURABILITY AND LOW MAINTENANCE COST.

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3. COMMENT: ABOVE INFORMATION SUGGESTS THAT AMERICAN
LOCOMOTIVE MANUFACTURERS SHOULD BE IN A STRONG COMPETITIVE
POSITION FOR NEXT ORDER BY STATE RAILWAYS OF THAILAND.
(CHIEF ADVISOR TO SRT RECENTLY EXPRESSED PERSONAL PREFERENCE
FOR GENERAL MOTORS LOCOMOTIVES.) HOWEVER, IT IS LIKELY THAT
FINANCING WILL AGAIN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE. THE PRESENT
MINISTER WOULD BE INFLUENCED MORE BY TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS
THAN BY LOW INTEREST, BUT HE IS NOT LIKELY TO BE IN OFFICE
WHEN THE CONTRACT IS LET.
KINTNER

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